

Key Concepts, Theories, and Issues in African/Black Psychology: A View From the Bridge

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Abstract

An impressive body of psychological literature exists that attests to the amount of intellectual labor put forth by Black psychologists in developing and implementing unique approaches to understanding people of African descent. Yet the impact of these contributions made by Black psychologists have often been marginalized and rendered invisible within the overall context of Black intellectual thought. The absence leaves a void in the literature for those seeking an accurate account of the ideas that shape contemporary Black thought. This cursory review of the psychological literature attempts to fill that void by examining some of the major issues, concepts, and themes addressed in African/Black psychology, as well as identifying a few neglected areas and offering suggestions for future research directions in the discipline.

Keywords

African/Black psychology, African-centered psychology, African-centered theory, Association of Black Psychologists, Africana intellectual history

The development of concepts and theories in African/Black psychology has been documented (Jones, 2006) in an attempt to highlight and preserve the intellectual history and institutional memory of African/Black psychology

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and the Association of Black Psychologists (ABPsi). An impressive body of psychological literature exists that attests to the amount of intellectual labor put forth by Black psychologists in developing and implementing unique approaches to understanding people of African descent. Yet the impact of these contributions made by Black psychologists have often been marginalized and rendered invisible within the overall context of Black intellectual thought (Banks, 1996). As a result, major theorists (Akbar, 2004a; Hilliard, 1995; Kambon, 2012; Myers, 1993; Nobles, 1986) with cutting-edge ideas and novel conceptual frameworks operate under the radar and are virtually unnoticed by mainstream Black scholarship. This absence leaves a void in the literature for those seeking an accurate account of the ideas that shape contemporary Black thought. Intellectual histories do the important work of unveiling intellectual antecedents and tracing the steps of those who laid the theoretical foundation (Jamison, 2016). While these narratives are important for Black psychologists, in particular, they also have relevance for intellectuals, activists, and laypersons interested in studying how scholarship can be used to serve the interests of African descent people. This cursory review of the psychological literature examines some of the major issues, concepts, and themes addressed in African/Black psychology, as well as identifying a few neglected areas and offering suggestions for future research directions in the discipline.

Intellectual Tradition

Pioneering Black psychologists, such as Francis C. Sumner, Martin B. Jenkins, Herman Canady, Inez Prosser, Mamie Clark, and Kenneth Clark (Guthrie, 1976) set the stage for what would evolve into a formal articulation of African/Black psychology. The literature produced on African/Black psychology since 1968 is an extension of their work and follows a tradition of intellectual engagement by Black scholars. Marable (2000) describes the Black intellectual tradition as descriptive, corrective, and prescriptive. According to Marable (2000), the descriptive component presents “the reality of black life and experiences from the point of view of black people themselves” (p. 1), and the corrective component “condemned and disputed theories of black people’s genetic, biological and cultural inferiority” (p. 2). The function of the prescriptive activities in the Black intellectual tradition “is to use history and culture as tools . . . for the purpose of transforming their actual conditions” (Marable, 2000, p. 2). Based on Marable’s criteria and the scholarly activities of Black psychologists (Banks, 1992; Nobles, 1986; Piper-Mandy & Rowe, 2010; Stewart, 2015), African/Black psychological theory, research, and practice can be situated within the scope of the

Black intellectual tradition. Black psychologists who continue this intellectual tradition develop theories that are consistent with the cultural realities of African descent people while seeking to improve their quality of life.

What Is African/Black Psychology?

Any deviation from the assumed universality of traditional/White psychology is often viewed with scrutiny, skepticism, and sometimes cynicism. What is African/Black psychology? Is it White psychology in Black face? If not, how does it differ from “traditional” psychology? If there is no formalized operationalization of an African/Black psychology, is there a need to construct one? What are its distinguishing traits and characteristics? Questions such as these and the varied responses to them have been at the core of defining the depth and breadth of African/Black psychology. William Smith’s (1974) editorial remarks in the first issue of the *Journal of Black Psychology* posed the question, “What Is Black Psychology”? Several responses appeared in this literature as attempts to answer this simple yet complex question (Akbar, 2004a; Baldwin, 1986; Nobles, 1980; Smith, 1974). The following statements serve to demonstrate the different theoretical orientations and conceptual tensions that developed as Black psychologists crafted various definitions of African/Black psychology. Smith (1974) attempted to answer his own question:

What is Black Psychology? . . . Black Psychology is the study of Black behavioral patterns. It deals with the total behavior in all situations of Black people throughout the world. A more definitive explanation will emerge as we investigate and learn more in this area. It is erroneous to assume that because Black Psychology has not been completely developed that it does not exist. (p. 5)

This definition is broad and indicates that the subject areas of African/Black psychology are Black people and their behaviors. Other than stating *who* is being studied, Smith does not provide any detailed description about *what* concepts, theories, and methods are applied when studying the psychology of Black people. While the definition is generic, Smith (1974) acknowledges this limitation and indicates that an expanded explanation of African/Black psychology will eventually emerge as scholars work through the theoretical kinks and develop a more expansive articulation of African/Black psychology. The *Black Scholar*, one of the oldest journals on Black studies and research, gave this definition:

Black Psychology has been defined as the study of the behavioral patterns of black people in a social environment that is manifestly antagonistic and unhealthy. . . . It is concerned with developing appropriate methodologies and tools required for valid analysis of the black experience, while at the same time criticizing the methodologies and tools of white western psychology. (Chrisman, 1975, p. 1)

This definition encompasses aspects of Smith's (1974) statement while recognizing additional components. The additional components are threefold and consist of African/Black psychology (a) addressing social issues, (b) developing culturally relevant methodologies, and (c) critiquing the racist methodologies employed by White/Western psychology. While this definition clearly stems from and builds on Smith's definition with specific content, it is still limited in expressing the traits and characteristics that define African/Black psychology as a unique approach to understanding people of African descent. Both statements define African/Black psychology as reactions to racism and oppression. Although reactions to racism and resistance to the hegemony of White psychology are important, a psychology based solely on how Black people respond to oppression runs the risk of defining Black people by their oppression instead of through their humanity.

Nobles (1980) warns against a ghettoized and oppression-based conceptualization of African/Black psychology that focuses on the psychological consequences of being Black (Wilcox, 1971). Nobles advises, "It is more than the 'darker dimension' of general psychology. Its unique status is derived not from the negative aspects of being black in America, but rather from the positive features of basic African philosophy" (Nobles, 1980, p. 23). Following the same strain of thought, Baldwin (1986) states,

African (Black) Psychology is defined as a system of knowledge (philosophy, definitions, concepts, models, procedures and practice) concerning the nature of the social universe from the perspective of African Cosmology. . . . What this definition means is that African (Black) Psychology is nothing more or less than the uncovering, articulation, operationalization, and application of the principles of the African reality structure relative to psychological phenomena. (p. 241)

Thirty years after Smith (1974) posed the question, "What Is Black Psychology," Akbar (2004a) queries the concept of an African Psychology:

What is African Psychology. . . . African Psychology is not a thing, but a place-a view, a perspective, a way of observing. African Psychology does not claim to be an exclusive body of knowledge, though a body of knowledge has and will

continue to be generated from the place. It is a perspective that is lodged in the historical primacy of the human view from the land that is known as Africa. (p. ix)

With their emphases on grounding African/Black psychology in African culture, the definitions offered by Nobles (1980), Baldwin (1986), and Akbar (2004a) intentionally connect their articulations with Africa, deconstruct the victimization basis of African/Black psychology, and make a conceptual shift away from simply reaction to reclamation and revitalization (Nobles, 1986). These definitions extend earlier definitions in that they address the cultural and theoretical basis for a developing body of literature in African/Black psychology that will continue to be produced and disseminated.

The most explicit attempt to define African/Black psychology as a merger of consciousness and social action that White (1980) articulates in "Toward a Black Psychology" is Wilson's (1998) understanding of African psychology. Wilson (1998) instructs:

At the center of African-centered psychology . . . is a psychology of power. It does not merely describe the traditional nature of African people, or the orientations of African people based on traditional African culture. It is a psychology that is prescriptive as well as descriptive. It is a psychology of liberation. (p. 7)

Wilson frames African/Black psychology as a form of critical consciousness that develops Black social theories (Wright, 1984) that do more than describe the cultural history and worldviews of people of African descent. For Wilson (1998), a functional and relevant African/Black psychology describes African worldviews and applies those cultural constructs to psychological phenomena, but it also provides solutions to their contemporary conditions and prescribes directions for where and how African people need to proceed in the future. All the aforementioned definitions allude to a particular role for Black psychologists in the systematic studying of Black thought and behavior along with their relationships with other groups, using culturally relevant theories, concepts, and methods that are grounded in their cultural reality and seek to improve the quality of life experienced by people of African descent.

The Role and Function of Black Psychologists

The role of the scholar/activist has been analyzed from diverse perspectives that differ depending on theoretical, ideological, and/or political orientation (Banks, 1996; Cruse, 1967; Frazier, 1973; Hare, 1969; Marable, 2000). In

The Death of White Sociology (Ladner, 1973), a compilation that contains Frazier's (1973) "Failure of the Negro Intellectual" and Hare's (1969) "Challenge to Black Scholars," Ladner (1973) argues, "Black psychologists have gone farther than Black sociologists in their attempts to legitimize a new perspective in their discipline" (p. 255). In similar fashion to Black sociologists, Black psychologists addressed the role of Black psychologists in very distinct ways. Some of the earliest articulations by Black psychologists on the role and function of African/Black psychology are "Guidelines for Black Psychologists" (White, 1970), "Toward a Black Psychology" (White, 1980), "Which Way Black Psychologists: Tradition, Modification, Verification" (Smith, 1973), "Theorizing on Black Behavior: The Role of the Black Psychologist" (Chimezie, 1973), and "Role of the Black Psychologists in African Liberation" (Baldwin, 1980). Out of this group, the two most influential have been the work of White (1970) and Baldwin (1980).

Acknowledged as the "Father of Black Psychology" (Guthrie, 1976), White outlines in "Guidelines for Black Psychologists" (1970) and "Toward a Black Psychology" (1980) some of the basic principles to which Black psychologists interested in applying African/Black psychology to the lives of Black people should consider. Influenced and inspired by the Black Freedom Movements of the 1960s and early 1970s (Stewart, 2015), White's (1980) manifesto to the Black psychological world reads as follows:

It is vitally important that we develop, out of the authentic experience of Black people in this country, an accurate workable theory of Black psychology. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to understand the lifestyles of Black people using traditional theories developed by white psychologists to explain white people. (p. 5)

Within this proclamation, White (1980) asserts that Black people's "experience with—and management of—key psychological concepts" (p. 8) is profoundly different from White people based on the different frames of reference used by the groups. White is in agreement with Bennett's (1970) position that "it is necessary for us to develop a new frame of reference which transcends the limits of white concepts" (p. 3). Because of these different frames of reference, White (1970) argues it is essential that Black psychologists develop theories that do not draw primarily from deficit-based psychological theories developed by White psychologists but from culturally relevant theories that address African American strengths. For White (1970), a prime example of maximizing cultural strengths and agency to reinterpret and reimagine Blackness is observed in the impact of the Black consciousness movement when "it begins to psychologically legitimize being Black" (p. 55). However,

White (1970) cautions, "We must not equate the imagery of that consciousness with the actualities of social change. . . . It must be a two-stage kind of operation, consciousness and action" (p. 55). Using Fanon's (1963) sociodiagnostic analysis and concern in *The Wretched of the Earth* (Fanon, 1967), White's (1970) prodding of Black psychologists to accept the mission of creating new theories and conducting research while simultaneously addressing social issues is a charge that Black psychologists continued to grapple with and cultivate as the emerging discipline of African/Black psychology developed (Baldwin, 1986; Smith, 1974).

Baldwin's (1989) "Role of Black Psychologists in Black Liberation" extends and expands White's (1970) charge and challenge to Black psychologists. Baldwin argues that the majority of Black psychologists does not understand the political aspects of African/Black psychology and has contributed to perpetuating the oppression of Black people. Consequently, Baldwin (1985) gave the following critiques. One, Black psychological theories have in reality turned out to be reactive and obscure (i.e., Blackenized versions of White theories) rather than being proactive and genuinely reflective of the African cultural/psychological reality. Two, Black psychologists have allowed Europeans to dictate what sources, data, and methods are valid and legitimate for research. Three, Black clinicians have treated Black people as if they were White people in Black skin, with only their experience of racism viewed as the distinguishing characteristic; and four, Black psychologists further the oppression of African people by disproportionately joining the American Psychological Association (APA) instead of joining and being active in ABPsi.

To counter the adverse consequences of the thinking and behaviors outlined, Baldwin (1989) urges Black psychologists to adopt an African worldview orientation and an African-centered ideological stance in their professional activities. When White's (1970) critique is juxtaposed with Baldwin's, an interesting shift occurs that has epistemological and political implications for African/Black psychology. White's frame of reference analysis is replaced and/or refined by Baldwin's worldview analysis. An African American working class-centered analysis transitions to an African-centered analysis that attempts to encompass all people of African descent. While drawing from White's emphasis on the dual task of theory development and social responsibility, Baldwin's critique is informed by and benefits from 17 years of professional activity by Black psychologists through scholarly books and articles aimed explicitly at establishing the parameters of African/Black psychology. Thus, his keen observations and overtly political tone emanate from a place and space of both insight and hindsight. Reflecting on Black psychological theory, research, and practice and as a past-president of ABPsi,

Baldwin's perspective is representative of a critical mass of scholars entrenched in the intellectual minefields of developing the workable theories of African/Black psychology first proposed by White (1970).

African-Centered Cultural Framework

The worldview paradigm is central to any discussion of African-centered psychology (Kambon, 2012; Karenga, 1992). It is the conceptual framework that forms the foundation for the development of African-centered psychological theory. African-centered psychologists implemented a worldview analysis as a conceptual framework for developing cultural constructs that could be used to interpret and understand the psychological experiences of African descent people. According to Carroll (2010), "A cultural group's understanding of the universe (cosmology), being (ontology), values (axiology), reasoning (logic) and knowledge (epistemology), all contribute to the ways in which a people make sense of their lived reality, i.e. their worldview" (p. 113). Scholarship on the African worldview identifies collectivism, respecting human-nature oneness, viewing the spiritual and material as one, focusing on affective-cognitive synthesis, valuing positive interpersonal relationships among people, emphasizing the union of opposites, stressing the extended self/multidimensionality of self, and appreciating spiritualism (Baldwin, 1986; Kambon, 2012; Myers, 1993) as being some of the fundamental attributes and characteristics of an African worldview. An intellectual history of the development of the African worldview framework is outlined in "A Genealogical Analysis of the Worldview Framework in African Psychology" (Carroll, 2010). Although a number of African-centered psychologists have described the African worldview, Carroll (2010) argues the following:

[T]hey all seem to build off of the earlier works developed by Vernon Dixon, Edwin Nichols and Wade Nobles. The discussion of the race specificity of worldview systems, as discussed by Kambon, along with Linda James Myers' more humanistic approach to the discussion of worldview differences, reflects the various means by which African-centered psychologists and psychological theorists have gone about utilizing the worldview framework to advance the field of African psychology. (p. 124)

Carroll (2010) traces the genealogy of ideas concerning aspects of an African worldview applied to the psychology of people of African descent through the work of Dixon (1976), Nichols (1976), Nobles (1980), Baldwin (1986), and Myers (1993), while offering a critical analysis of how the literature on

the African worldview evolved. This type of genealogical work is important in that it describes the scope and direction of several proponents of worldview analyses and demonstrates the similarities and differences in the various approaches.

By anchoring their articulations of African psychology within the African worldview framework, African-centered psychologists address several pertinent questions/issues. What function does an African-centered worldview framework serve as a conceptual tool? What is the heuristic value of employing the African worldview as an analytical and explanatory device for studying cultural phenomena? What larger theoretical issues are these psychologists addressing through their development of African-centered cultural constructs? The answers to these and similar questions allow scholars to grasp and evaluate the utility and efficacy of the African worldview framework. The African worldview framework addresses the early issues raised by Black psychologists concerning frames of reference (White, 1970) and definitional systems (Baldwin, 1980). Baldwin argues that individuals' definitional system is determined by their particular cultural reality, and thus worldviews "determine how we experience (perceive and respond to) the various phenomena of the ongoing process of everyday existence" (Baldwin, 1980, p. 96). Thus, White's (1970) call for new theoretical orientations and Baldwin's (1980) definitional system are both examples of the need for an African worldview analysis.

The African worldview framework provides Black psychologists a conceptual base from where they can develop theoretical arguments about cultural differences. In "Voodoo or IQ: An Introduction to African Psychology" (Clark, McGhee, Nobles, & Weems, 1975), the authors argue that the differences between African psychology and European psychology are representative of the fundamental cultural differences between Black people and White people. Previous attempts to account for these cultural differences were grounded in cultural pathology analyses, and often concluded that African descent people are not only different, but are deficient based on European/White cultural standards (White, 1970). Through the mis-education process (Woodson, 1990), African descent people have been taught that they are blank cultural slates devoid of history and culture. Thus, worldview analyses define, describe, and explain the African and African-derived aspects of the African diaspora. An African worldview analysis also provides a framework to address the intricacies involved in examining similarities/differences and continuities/discontinuities (Nobles, 1986; Robertson, 1997) throughout the African diaspora and thus functions as a gathering notion (Outlaw, 1996) for understanding the global existence of African descent people. The African worldview framework attempts to deconstruct

European cultural hegemony by constructing guidelines for interpreting African cultural and social realities.

Methodological Issues

In their quest to develop a workable theory of African/Black psychology (White, 1970), Black psychologists had to wrestle with what has been called a theoretical and methodological crisis (Banks, 1996). The methodological crisis has manifested itself in several ways. There have been debates in the psychological literature around the issues of methods and methodology (Azibo, 1988; Cokley & Awad, 2013; McDougal, 2014). Scholars have addressed the crisis from different perspectives (Azibo, 1988; Banks, 1992; Carruthers, 1996; Semaj, 1996). In "Science and Oppression" (1996), Carruthers scrutinizes scholarship conducted under the guise of science and its relationship to maintaining and perpetuating oppression. Carruthers (1996) questions the usefulness of Western science for people of African descent and argues, "The scientific community and its admirers arrogantly assert that science is itself objective and neutral, i.e., that it can be used for good and bad; but our wisdom instructs us otherwise" (p. 186). His critique of Western thought queries the function that Western scientific methods serve in the liberation of African minds from European-centered thought. Carruthers (1996) recognizes that some possible although limited uses of Western methodology for people of African descent are (a) to buffer against undesirable conclusions generated by the abuse of the methodology and (b) to generate necessary liberatory knowledge, using the only methodology designed to deal with the ills of this social system. Yet, in the final analysis, Carruthers argues for the dismantling of the scientific method because its basic assumptions are based on oppression. According to Carruthers (1996),

It is the Master's science, not only in the sense that he used it to control his subjects, but also in the sense that it was established through and for oppression. . . . Thus, the science or methodology is not neutral or objective; it is the science of control through intervention and/or the unnatural alteration (if possible) of all objects. (p. 188)

For Carruthers (1996), African-centered social scientists are in an interesting predicament in that they are "caught between the philosophy of liberation and the methodology of oppression" (p. 190). Although Carruthers calls for a dismantling of the scientific method, he warns that it is dangerous to deconstruct without having an alternative to fill the void and urges that African-centered social scientists "resolve the contradiction and put our program together"

(p. 191). Hence, Carruthers issues a call for Black scholars to intentionally devote more intellectual energy toward developing and refining cultural-specific research skills and agendas.

Azibo's (1988) theory-derived steady state approach elaborates on what Semaj (1996) calls cultural science. The article "Personality, Clinical, and Social Psychological Research on Blacks: Appropriate and Inappropriate Research Frameworks" (Azibo, 1988) is an attempt by Azibo to fill the void discussed by Carruthers (1996). Azibo takes issue with and critiques the ways in which the comparative and cross-cultural approaches have been used in psychological research. Historically, these approaches have contributed to strengthening European cultural hegemony (Nobles, 1986) and continuing the study of African descent people as the marginalized cultural other (Ani, 1994). Invariably, comparative and cross-cultural approaches tend to lead back to comparing and contrasting Black people with a White norm or standard that is assumed to be universal (White, 1970). Consequently, the cultural deficit and inferiority-oriented models (White, 1970) remain intact. In contrast to the comparative and cross-cultural approaches, Azibo (1988) suggests a theory-derived steady state approach that is comprised of (a) constructs that are selected from African-centered psychological theories; (b) instruments conceptually derived from these African-centered theories; and (c) data collection and hypotheses testing. This approach underscores the notion that "our theories of society, not our empirical evidence, guide how we interpret racial data" (Zuberi, 2001, p. 144). The model stresses the development of African-centered theories accompanied by culturally congruent instruments that are used to empirically test (via the scientific method) the validity and applicability of African-centered psychological constructs. Azibo proposes this approach as a viable solution to the "researcher's paradox" that confronts African-centered psychologists (Carruthers, 1996).

Whereas Azibo's (1988) theory-derived steady state approach highlights the intricate relationship between theory and methods (methodology), Banks in two articles, "The Theoretical and Methodological Crisis of the Africentric Conception" (1992) and "Theory and Method in the Growth of African American Psychology" (1999), complicate this relationship within the context of how different schools of thought (Banks, 1992; Karenga, 1992; Nobles, 1986) in African/Black psychology have historically approached and critiqued the role of empiricism in relation to psychological research. While Boykin (1978) argues that empirical methods are not inherently abusive, Banks (1999) counters this argument by stating that empirical methods are often perceived as "just good doctrines put to ill purpose, when they may be no less than ill doctrines put to degenerate purposes" (p. 4). According to Banks (1999), two of the major criticisms Black psychologists have posited

since African/Black psychology emerged as a formal area of study have been (a) that science is ideology and (b) that empirical research is inherently destined to prove claims of African American inferiority. Banks (1999) describes the Africanist and empiricists schools of thought to demonstrate how Black psychologists have navigated the “methodological crisis” (Banks, 1992). According to Banks (1999), the heavily theory-driven Africanist (African-centered) school has “a deep appreciation of the role of theory in the justification of ideological program, with only the barest attention to the protective demands of theory for a methodological framework” (p. 6), while the empiricist school has sought to establish “impeccable methodological credentials for whatever theoretical constructs those (scholars) might defend” (p. 6). Banks’ analysis provides a nuanced articulation on the role and function of empiricism in African/Black psychology that places the debate among Black psychologists in conversation with similar discourses in the history of science and the sociology of knowledge (Kuhn, 1970; Mannheim, 1954).

While the debate concerning whether to be empirical or not was a much-needed discussion that assisted in providing Black psychologists an opportunity to hash out some important methodological issues, the substance and content of the debate were often misguided. An example of an African-centered balance is the cultural scientist methodology proposed by Semaj (1996), who advocates for African-centered social scientists “to integrate knowledge gained by the interplay of reason and experimentation with knowledge gained by experience, inspiration, and revelation” (p. 200). Semaj (1996) posits this model as a combining of the “empirical and intuitive models” (p. 200) that are representative of scientific methods and modes of inquiry implemented by early African civilizations (Diop, 1991). Theoretical and empirical articles by Azibo (1988) and Cokley and Awad (2013) problematize the idea that quantitative methods are antithetical to African-centered psychology. The misguided contextualization of empiricism as a strictly European endeavor is a by-product of some scholars unwittingly practicing cultural misorientation (Kambon, 2003) and cultural surrender (Hilliard, 1995). Which is to say that they have mistakenly overlooked the idea that the African worldview paradigm emphasizes di-unital thinking and the synthesizing of the affective and cognitive modes of inquiry (Dixon, 1976; Myers, 1993; Nichols, 1976). The main points of contention with the utility of empiricism are the unbalanced emphasis placed on the quantitative aspects of empirical research juxtaposed to other approaches and that this form of empiricism is used to rationalize African inferiority and thus justify the oppression of African people; not necessarily the use of the method itself (Azibo, 1988; Zuberi, 2001).

African-Centered Instruments and Classification/Diagnostic Systems

Reginald Jones' *Handbook of Tests and Measurements for Black Populations* (1996) was a pivotal publication that underscored not only the importance of culturally specific instruments but also highlighted the scholarly production of Black psychologists actively engaged in the process of creating these instruments. Jones (1996) makes his position on the importance of producing and disseminating culturally specific instruments clear:

The instruments are not developed for use in comparative studies. Indeed, because of their cultural specificity, they are *inappropriate* (italics in original) for use in such as most ethically oriented instruments administered to African Americans are often inappropriate. The instruments included herein are presented as measures which enhance understanding of only a single group, African Americans. (p. 9)

Grounded in Jones' (1996) position, African-centered psychologists examined the relationship between African-centered theory and the operationalization of these constructs through African-centered instruments (Jones, 1996; Utsey, Belvet, & Fischer, 2009) and classification systems (Akbar, 2004b, 2014c). The theory-derived steady state approach (Azibo, 1988) calls for an end to comparative studies and argues for the development of instruments conceptually derived from African-centered theories. Alongside the theory-derived steady state approach, African-centered instruments are attempts to measure African-centered theories and concepts. Some instruments that specifically address the worldview construct are the World-View Opinionnaire (Kelsey & Ransom, 1996), the Individual/collective World-View Scale (McCombs, 1996), the Worldview Scale (Baldwin & Hopkins, 1990), and the Worldview Analysis Scale (Obasi, Flores, & James-Myers, 2009). Utsey et al. (2009) identify the African Self-Consciousness Scale (ASCS; Baldwin & Bell, 1985), the Oshodi Sentence Completion Index/Africentric Sentence Completion Test (Oshodi, 1999), Africentric Home Environment Inventory (Caughy, Randolph, & O'Campo, 2002), the Belief Systems Analysis Scale (BSAS; Montgomery, Fine, & James-Myers, 1990), the Communalism Scale (Boykin, Jagers, Ellison, & Albury, 1997), the Africultural Coping Systems Inventory (Utsey, Adams, & Bolden, 2000), and the Africentrism Scale (Grills & Longshore, 1996) as instruments that assess African-centered psychological constructs.

The ASCS and the BSAS are two of the most widely used instruments to assess worldviews. The ASCS (Baldwin & Bell, 1985) is a 42-item instrument that assesses the Black personality construct of African Self-Consciousness. The ASCS measures four primary competencies: (a) awareness/recognition of

one's African identity and heritage; (b) general ideological and activity priorities placed on African/Black survival, liberation, and proactive/affirmative development; (c) specific activity priorities placed on self-knowledge and self-affirmation/collective African survival; and (d) a posture of resistance toward "anti-African/Black" forces, and threats to African/Black survival in general. Elaborating on the worldview work of Nichols (1976) and Dixon (1976), Montgomery et al. (1990) developed the 31-item BSAS. Focusing on the conceptual dimensions of worldview, ontology, values, logic, identity, acquisition of knowledge, and sense of worth, the BSAS was constructed to empirically assess the Afrocentric worldview construct.

Additional African-centered instruments (Utsey et al., 2009) and more empirical research agendas are needed from African-centered psychologists (Cokley, 2009; Utsey, 2008). While there was an initial thrust in the proliferation of African-centered scales published during the 1990s, there has been a decline and dearth of recent scholarship in the area of instrument construction (Utsey et al., 2009). Utsey et al. (2009) opine,

In the absence of an adequate body of empirical literature with which to evaluate the evidence in favor of the psychometric utility of instruments used to assess African-centered constructs, there exists a reduced likelihood that there will be significant advances in the discipline of African (Black) Psychology. (p. 85)

Continuous refinement of African-centered instruments is paramount (Grayman-Simpson & Mattis, 2017). It behooves African-centered psychologists to further develop instruments and conduct research that operationalizes African-centered constructs. The development of such instruments is a redress to the methodological crisis (Banks, 1992) and provides the practical capacity to employ the research process and designs addressed by Azibo (1988) in the theory derived steady state approach.

One of the essential ways for a group to assert their agency and cultural autonomy is to define for themselves on their own cultural terms what it means to be mentally healthy (Akbar, 2004b). Within the context of mental disorders, Akbar (2004b) asserts, "We do ourselves a disservice to let the psychiatrists, psychologists and other so-called specialists from other cultural persuasions define our mentally disordered people for us" (p. 175). From Akbar's perspective, canonical texts, such as *Mark of Oppression* (Kardiner & Ovesey, 1962) and *Black Rage* (Grier & Cobbs, 1968), lack the proper cultural perspective needed to fully comprehend the dynamics undergirding African American mental health. Thus, African-centered psychologists have developed classification systems of mental disorders (Akbar, 2004b, 2014)

and culturally specific treatment approaches (Azibo, 1996; Nobles, Goddard, & Gilbert, 2009; Oshodi, 1999; Phillips, 1990) that seek to apply the cultural constructs articulated in African-centered psychological theory.

Drawing from Fanon's (1963, 1967) understanding of the psychology of oppression, Akbar (2004b) addresses the relationship between cultural imposition (Fanon, 1963) and mental disorder. Akbar (2004b) classified four mental disorders exhibited among African Americans: the alien-self disorder, the anti-self disorder, and the self-destructive disorder. The alien-self disorder is characterized by a person being unaware or salient as to issues concerning race and/or culture. The anti-self disorder manifests as a person being antagonistic toward their cultural selves and others that are representative of and/or reflect their cultural selves. The self-destructive disorder refers to behaviors such as drug abuse, alcoholism, and forms of self-directed violence. And the organic disorders are classified as mental disorders that have chemical and/or biological origins. According to Akbar (2004b), it is imperative that mental health professional working with African descent people possess "the sensitive ability to differentiate what are the differential roles of the environment, the mind and the culture and the genetic make-up of the person" (p. 188). Akbar's model highlights the relationship between definitional systems (Baldwin, 1984), culture-specific psychological theories (Kambon, 2012; Nobles, 1986), and holistic approaches to understanding human experiences (Myers, 1993).

A more expansive conceptualization and development of an African-centered classification system are seen with the Azibo Nosologies I and II (Azibo, 1989, 1998, 2014). The Nosologies define African-centered mental health as "psychological and behavioral functioning that is in accord with the basic nature of the original human nature and its attendant cosmology (cultural deep thought) and survival thrust" (Azibo, 2014, p. 36). Azibo elaborates on Akbar's (2004b) disorders and grounds the Nosologies in various Black psychological theories (Baldwin, 1984; Black, Braithwaite, & Taylor, 1980; Dixon, 1976; Fanon, 1963; Thomas, 1971; Williams, 1981), and synthesizes them into a classification system. The original Azibo Nosology (1989) categorized 18 disorders of the African personality, including, but not limited to materialistic depression, personal identity conflict, psychological brainwashing, oppression violence reaction, self-destructive disorders, theological misorientation, and organic disorders. The Azibo II Nosology expands the initial classifications from 18 disorders to 55 disorders. According to Azibo (1989), the Azibo Nosology is based on the following assumptions: (a) the nature of the relationship between personality order and disorder, (b) the utter criticality of the self in personality or mental order and disorder, and (c) the reality that values are fundamentally inherent in the diagnostic process.

African-centered psychologists have recognized and addressed the social and political implications of psychological diagnosis. Wilson (1993) argues, "When an individual is labeled (diagnosed) in an unjust and unequal society . . . then the very labels attached to the victims of that society are the very means by which repression is carried out in that system" (p. 88). For African-centered psychologists, mental health must be viewed in conjunction with racism and European cultural hegemony (Azibo, 1996). Furthermore, Wilson (1993) argues,

In the context of a racist social system, psychological diagnosis, labeling and treatment of the behavior of politically oppressed persons are political acts performed to attain political ends. . . . If oppression is to operate with a maximum efficiency, it must become and remain a psychological condition achieving self-perpetuating motion by its own internal dynamics. (p. 3)

Classification systems are not only cultural constructed instruments but also social and political tools that maintain and perpetuate particular worldviews that impact people's lived experiences. Thus, the construction of classification systems is considered both cultural and political acts that are part and parcel of a psychology of liberation. The attempts to establish classification systems that define the parameters of cultural reality demonstrate the intellectual autonomy and audacity to step outside of Eurocentric boundaries and imagine a conceptual space where African-centered psychological theory, research, and practice can develop.

Future Directions in African/Black Psychology

The focus of this review is not solely on the *Journal of Black Psychology (JBP)*, but the *JBP* is relevant in that it gives an indication of the issues, concepts, and themes in African/Black psychology. Few content analyses have been conducted on the *JBP* (Cokley, Awosogba, & Taylor, 2014; Cokley, Caldwell, Miller, & Muhammad, 2001; Jamison, 2007; Jamison & Carroll, 2014; Steele & Davis, 1984). As the major voice of Black psychologists and the primary site for the production and consumption of Black psychological literature (Cokley et al., 2014; Jamison & Carroll, 2014), content analyses of the *JBP* provide insight into the past as well as the future directions of African/Black psychology. Content analysis conducted by Cokley et al. (2001) and Cokley et al. (2014), covering the years between 1985-1999 and 2000-2011, respectively, found similar results in the topics covered during these periods. Their findings were that there was an overrepresentation of articles focused on racial identity/personality and that there was a recent scarcity of African-centered research

published in the journal. Cokley et al. (2014) discuss possible stagnation within the scope and direction of African-centered research. The pioneers (Akbar, 2004a; Clark, 1972; Kambon, 2012; Nobles, 1986) in African-centered psychology provide a foundation and a conceptual anchor for theory, research, and practice in African/Black psychology. Yet it is important that younger scholars continue to be trained in African-centered theories and methodologies, while applying their skill sets in new and nuanced ways to pressing issues affecting the lived experiences of African people throughout the diaspora (Cokley et al., 2014; Jamison & Carroll, 2014; Utsey, 2008). In order to avoid and/or prevent being caught in the quagmires of conceptual stagnation, it is imperative that further theoretical and empirical research covering an array of topics relevant to African descent people be included in the research agendas of African-centered psychologists.

One area that is beginning to receive more attention and is in need of further exploration is Pan African Black Psychology (Nobles, 2013, 2015). Nobles (2015) envisions Pan African Black Psychology as “an African-centered interdisciplinary and multidimensional investigation of African philosophy, literature, languages, history, politics, aesthetics, spirituality, and science” (p. 404). Through their focus on African worldview constructs and their emphasis on the cultural unity of African people on the continent and throughout the diaspora, African-centered psychologists have theorized and conducted research on the existence of a Pan African Black Psychology. In fact, it can be argued that the idea of Pan Africanism is embedded in the definition of African/Black psychology as articulated by African-centered psychologists (Nobles, 1986). Nobles (2015) focuses on various expressions of Pan African Black Psychology throughout the diaspora. The fundamental thesis put forth by Nobles (2013) is the importance of establishing a process for re-memembering the fractured identities of African people as a result of the Maafa (great disaster of enslavement/oppression) and colonization. Similar to Nobles, Thiong’o (2009) refers to this process as “the quest for wholeness after the Great Dismemberment” (p. 29). However, there are issues that complicate the re-memembering process. What type of conversations need to take place between Africans throughout the diaspora that counter the internalized racism and cultural misorientation (Kambon, 2012) that may inhibit them from finding a common ground on which to construct a Pan African Black Psychology? Do all adherents to African psychology agree on an operational definition of African psychology? How do definitions of African psychology on the continent of Africa (Nwoye, 2015; Ratele, 2017) differ from the definitions articulated by U.S.-based African-centered psychologists (Akbar, 2004a; Baldwin, 1986; Nobles, 1980). Conversations revolving around these questions are critical because they bring continental and diasporic voices into

a discourse that has often been dominated and defined by African-centered psychologists based in North America. Similar conversations must continue if practitioners of African/Black psychology are to actualize the ideals of Pan African Black Psychology.

Additional areas that should receive more attention in African-centered psychology are issues related to Black women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) communities. In *A Voice from the South* (Cooper, 1988), Anna Julia Cooper (1988) eloquently states, "Only the Black woman can say 'when and where I enter . . . the whole Negro race enters with me'" (p. 31). Relative to African/Black psychology, this statement can be interpreted as meaning when and where women and women's issues enter into the African-centered psychological narrative on a broad scale, the whole of African/Black psychology and African people enter the discourse. There have been numerous women presidents and distinguished psychologists of ABPsi who have contributed to the advancement of the discipline and the profession. However, when some scholars discuss the major figures and heavy hitters who have developed African/Black psychology (Jamison, 2007; Karenga, 1992), the voices and contributions of these women are often overlooked. With the exception of Linda James Myers (1993) and perhaps Frances Cress Welsing (1991), the overall impression in the literature is that African/Black psychology is an endeavor whose primary articulators have been men. It is suggested that future research bring more attention to African-centered scholarship produced by women and highlight the issues addressed in their research.

One of the most neglected areas in African-centered psychology that has received little attention are issues related to LGBTQ people of African descent. Wright (1984) instructs that no stone should go unturned and that forward-thinking scholars must place all issues under their scope to be studied. Unanimous agreement on an issue is not a necessary prerequisite for constructive understanding. In the spirit of Maat (truth, justice, balance, reciprocity), African-centered psychologists have to be able to discuss difficult issues without marginalizing and othering African descent people who are members of their communities. The concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) has assisted scholars and activists in understanding the relationship between the multiple aspects of people's lived experiences and their access to power and opportunities that affect their quality of life. While intersectionality is a term utilized in academic and activist circles, the term can also be viewed as a version of the African notion of wholeness. As contemporary healers, the mission of African-centered psychologists should be to heal a whole people (Roberson, 1996). The healing of a whole people can only occur if all the aspects and/or variables that influence their lived experiences are addressed.

Ultimately, the value of African/Black psychology rests in its ability to foster effective programs that assist in facilitating social change. Along these lines, more attention should be given to the role and function of Black Liberation Psychology (Thompson & Alfred, 2009). Liberation psychologists operate in the capacity of “theorists, researchers, and practitioners to help remove both tangible and psychological obstructions to life fulfillment and thus ‘liberate’ African-descended people from the stronghold of racism and white supremacy” (Thompson & Alfred, 2009, p. 483). In discussing the relationship between African/Black Psychology and Black Liberation Psychology, Thompson and Alfred (2009) argue that Black Liberation psychologists should be engaged in the following: (a) increasing critical consciousness; (b) improving relationships; (c) organizing socially and politically; (c) promoting positive mental health functioning/self-care; and (d) enhancing academic achievement. Brookins (1999) highlights the following: (a) that African-centered psychologists have historically been involved in the community but there should be more attempts to measure the extent to which they been effective in altering the basic nature of communities and (b) that African-centered psychologists must articulate long term visions of what our communities should look like and be specific about short- and long-term objectives toward realizing those visions.

Further development and refinement of African-centered research, theory, and practice continue in the scholar/activist tradition on which African/Black psychology was founded. Pioneering Black psychologists and the founders of ABPsi envisioned a discipline grounded in rigorous research and social responsibility. The triple task of research, theory, and socially relevant practice was predicated on challenging and often deconstructing mainstream psychological narratives that limited the ways in which African descent people were discussed in psychology. These psychologists broke out of the conceptual boxes that prohibited Black psychologists from examining and exploring multifaceted approaches to understanding the psychological experiences of African descent people. By moving beyond the paradigmatic limitations of Eurocentric psychology, they were able to transcend imposed conceptual restraints while forging new intellectual terrains that posed different questions and sought innovative solutions to the complex realities faced by African descent people.

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